

SpeakUp Launch Guide

Online citizen engagement tools

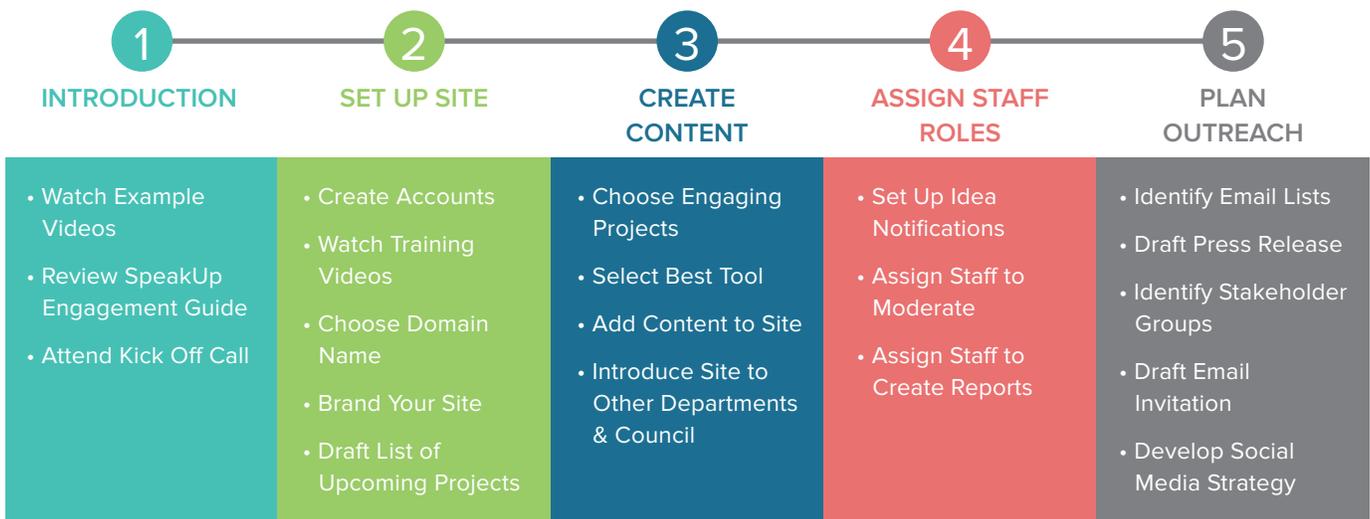
Citizen engagement is a priority for many public agencies. Traditionally, governments have relied heavily on public meetings to share information with citizens and gather their feedback. Public meetings, although an important form of engagement, often require a lot of staff time, receive low turnout and create challenges in sharing citizen's feedback with decision makers.

Increasingly, citizens are connecting with each other online and expecting their governments to follow suit. Many public agencies use social media tools to communicate with citizens. Although these tools are great for broadcasting out information, they are not designed to facilitate robust engagement over the lifecycle

of government projects. In addition, agency staff struggle to relay information shared through social media to department leaders and council members.

SpeakUp is a set of online citizen engagement tools that help public agencies easily gather feedback and collect ideas from citizens. These tools are a convenient way for citizens to stay engaged in the governing process and, in turn, help the organization collect timely and actionable input from citizens.

This document outlines the five-step process to engage with your citizens through SpeakUp.

LAUNCHING SPEAKUP


1 Introduction: Learning What's Possible with SpeakUp

Public agencies across the U.S. and Canada have partnered with Granicus to engage with thousands of their citizens online. When you begin using SpeakUp, you'll have the opportunity to learn from other agencies that are successfully using these tools. You will have access to a library of online videos highlighting successful SpeakUp projects and monthly informational webinars that introduce new features and showcase best practices from other Granicus clients.

The City of Austin, Texas has built a group of nearly 4,000 citizens who engage in online discussions, provide ideas for City improvements and respond to surveys. The City of Edina, Minn., hosts at least one online discussion every month, gathering feedback from residents on everything from proposed regulation changes to updates to neighborhood plans. The City of Moore, Okla., used SpeakUp to elicit the help of more than 3,000 residents in naming its new City park.

These and other other examples will show it is possible to build an online network of citizens who will give you quality feedback on your projects. Get inspired!

2 Setting Up Your Site

After you've explored how other municipalities use SpeakUp to engage with citizens, it's time to set up your site. SpeakUp is a standalone, template website, but there are several configurations you can make. Our training videos walk you through setting up your site. Here are a few of the steps you'll take to get started:

- **Choose a name for your site.** Many of our clients use SpeakUp in their site names. These examples include: SpeakUp Hermosa Beach, SpeakUp Arlington and SpeakUp Yountville. Other examples are: Be Heard Harrisonburg, Tyler Speaks and Bend Voice. After you choose your site name, Granicus will purchase the appropriate domain name for you.
- **Brand your site.** When your citizens visit your SpeakUp site, you want them to recognize your agency's brand. Create a banner for your site that includes your site name, your agency's logo and colors. The banner will appear across the top of each page of your site. You can also upload a background image. Choose an image that a majority of your citizens will recognize. Plan to change the background image periodically to keep your site fresh.
- **Create a list of upcoming projects.** As you work on setting up your site, you can also identify upcoming projects that departments across your agency will be working on over the next several months. Creating this list will give you a jumpstart on Step 3, where you will add content to your site.

3 Creating Content for Your First Engagement Projects

Now you're ready to begin adding content. Our training videos will walk you through the details of how to add

new discussions, forums and surveys. Before you jump into adding content, take some time to consider which projects you want to use to launch your SpeakUp site. Here are a few suggestions to consider:

- **Be bold and address hot topics.** Often, there are a few high-profile projects you're working on. It may be proposed regulation for vacation rentals or changes to a popular park. By hosting conversations about these topics on your SpeakUp site, you show your citizens you are committed to engagement. You will also have the opportunity to publicly correct any misinformation that may be associated with the project and get input from citizens from whom you may not normally hear. In addition, your informed citizens will often help educate those who may be less-informed.
- **Trust that conversations can remain civil.** Many public agencies are reluctant to host public online conversations out of fear that citizens may co-opt the conversations and make disparaging remarks. Our experience with SpeakUp sites in the U.S. and Canada shows these fears are often unfounded. It's important to distinguish between comments from citizens who may not agree with what you are doing and comments that are disruptive. For disruptive comments, there are several tools built into the sites that help ensure conversations remain civil. You should welcome comments that provide a different perspective, as long as those are stated in an appropriate manner.
- **Use SpeakUp differently than other social media.** Social media tools are designed to help you broadcast information to large groups of people and are based on micro-interactions. SpeakUp is a platform for engaging (not just informing) citizens and is used for deeper interactions. On Facebook, you post this question, "What's your favorite restaurant in the city?". On SpeakUp, the question is, "How would you like the City to regulate food trucks?"

Here are few content guidelines to consider for your projects:

- Provide enough background information to help your citizens meaningfully participate but do not overwhelm users with a lot of text. Instead of including all of the relevant information in the description, use links, allowing those citizens who want more information to find it.
- Provide information on what you will do with the feedback collected for each project. Will you be including it in a staff report, or sharing it with your Council?
- Ask clear questions. You may want to test your questions with a few of your colleagues to ensure citizens will understand what you are asking.

4 Assigning Staff to Manage Your Site

You will find that managing your SpeakUp site takes considerably less time than managing other forms of citizen engagement. However, it's important that you integrate SpeakUp into your engagement processes and create a structure so staff know how to use this tool. There are two main models that most SpeakUp clients use: 1) one department serves as the main coordinator for all parts of SpeakUp working with other departments to identify projects, respond to questions, etc.; 2) each department adds their own projects and is responsible to respond to questions posted about their projects. Choose a management structure that works for your context.

It's also important that you share feedback you gather through your SpeakUp site with council members and department directors. SpeakUp allows you to create reports compiling your citizens' comments. When you're assigning staff roles, be sure to include a plan for how you will get the appropriate information to your decision makers.

5 Planning Outreach for Your Site

Now that you have set up your site, created content for your first projects and decided how you will respond to citizens, it's time to get the word out and publicly launch your project! Here are a few things to consider:

- Use all of your communication channels to invite citizens to participate on your SpeakUp site. This could include emailing your contact lists, making announcements at public meetings, posting information on your social media outlets, contacting neighborhood associations and advocacy organizations, creating a press release, etc.
- Create a social media plan for promoting your SpeakUp projects. We typically see around 60% of traffic to SpeakUp sites coming from Facebook. At a minimum, plan a weekly Facebook post about each of your SpeakUp projects. As much as possible, use engaging language in the post and include a clear ask.
- When sending email invitations to SpeakUp, pay attention to the subject line and the preheader (the first line of text that appears in many email clients). Keep your emails short and to the point. Make sure you include a value proposition- what's in it for the people receiving the email?- and a clear call to action.

Granicus has created numerous resources to help you be successful in each step of this launch process. You will have access to blog articles, training videos, webinars and strategy phone calls. With SpeakUp, you will have a tool that will make it easy for you to engage with your citizens. **Let's get started!**